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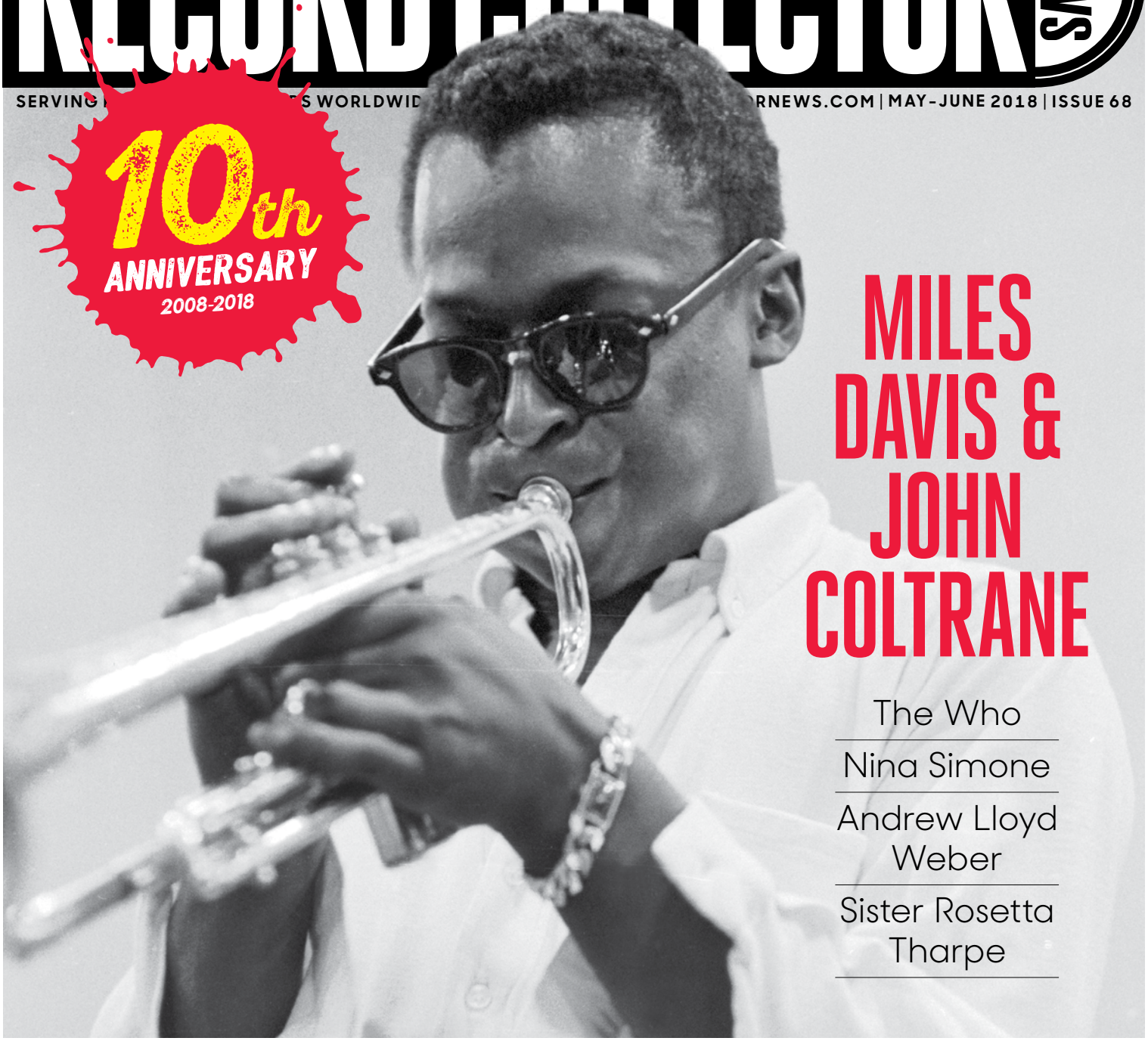
10th ANNIVERSARY 2008-2018



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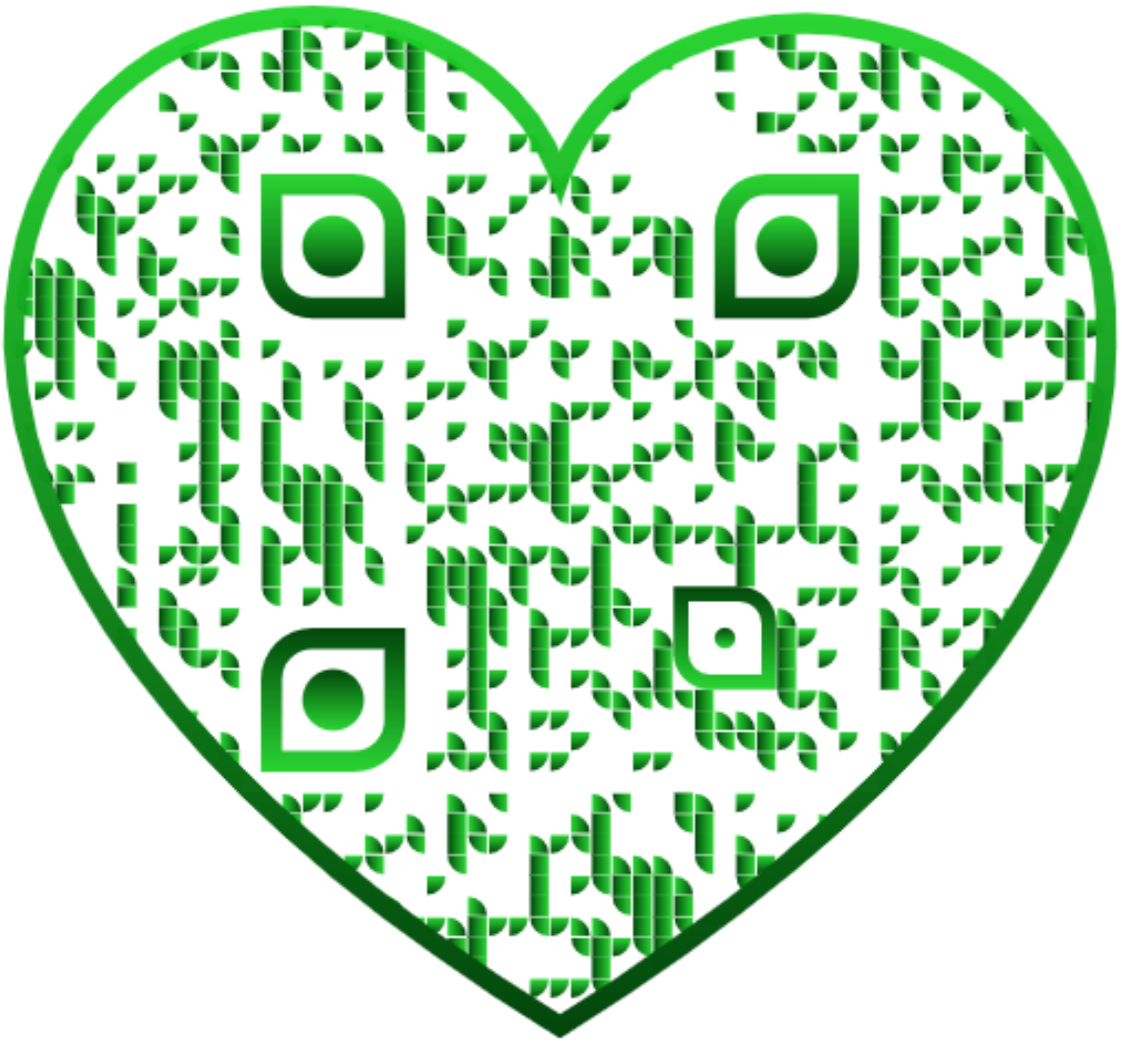

MUSIC MEETS THE MOB IN THE ACCLAIMED DOCUMENTARY
ABOUT ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME LEGEND

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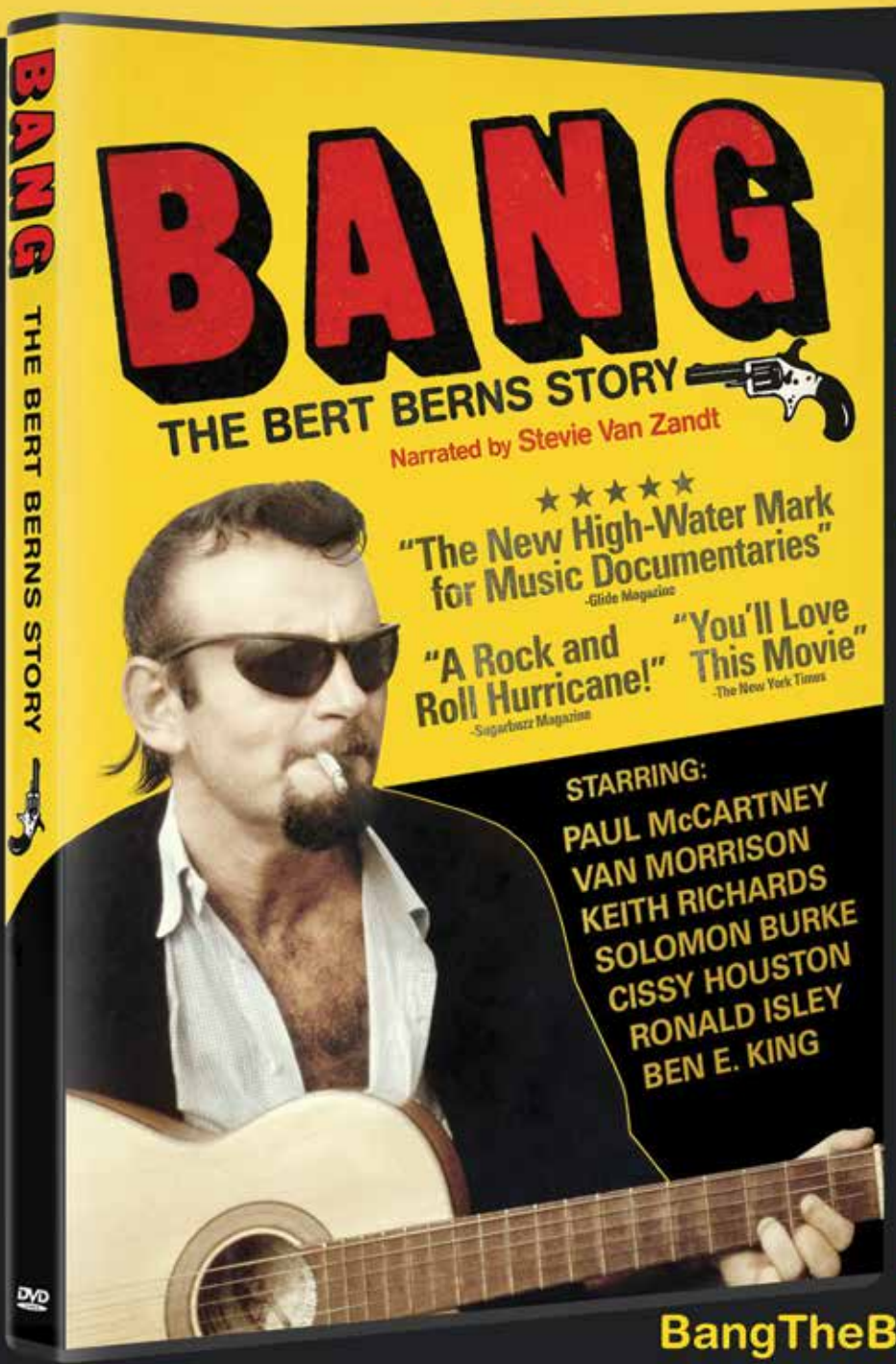

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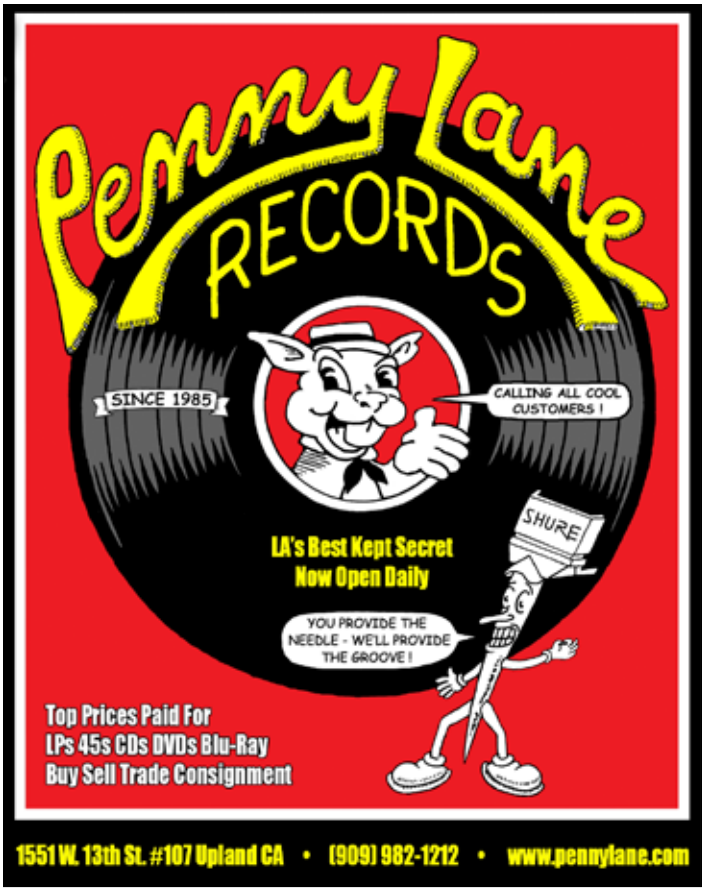

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RECORD COLLECTOR NEWS
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VOL. 11, NO. 1, MAY-JUNE 2018, ISSUE 68

JIM KAPLAN - PUBLISHER

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ON THE COVER
Photo of Miles Davis
Don Hunstein Sony Music Archives

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-"You Can Never Tell," Chuck Berry

Distributed FREE at record stores and conventions on the West Coast, Chicago and New York City.

Subscriptions are available by first class mail. Seven issues, $35.00. (Canada and Mexico $50 all other countries $75.) USA subscriptions can order your subscription online at recordcollectornews.com. International subscriptions should email jim@recordcollectornews.com. *Record Collector News*. P.O. Box 5664, Glendale, CA 91221. 818-209-5685.

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RECORD COLLECTOR news

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10th Anniversary— how time does fly

The *Record Collector News* World Headquarters vinyl collection — a work in progress

AN OLD STORY. TELL ME IF you've heard this story before. Ten years ago, as the Great Recession was getting into high gear, I found myself unemployed — along with a ton of other people — just as the entire world economy was supposedly circling the drain. Plus, after thirty years in the alternative newspaper business, the handwriting was on the internet wall. Print was dead. Capitalism and vinyl records, everyone was saying, were dead too.

That's what was banging around in my head as I strolled into a neighborhood record store. I was there because I needed some solace from my troubles. Instinctively, I was looking for peace in the record bins. I needed the joy a used record or two can bring.

Bob Say, the owner of FreakBeat Records, who was aware of my situation, hit me with, "So, what are you going to do with your life now, Kaplan?" In an attempt to quickly end this conversation, I tossed off what I thought was the stupidest idea I could come up with on the spot. "I'm starting a record collector paper, Bob."

At that point Bob got really serious and held up a copy of *Record Convention News*. I had never seen it. Apparently, it had ceased publication four or five years earlier when the publisher, Jim Philbrook, had passed away.

"You should do this," said Bob.

So, I changed the name to *Collector* and six weeks later the first issue of *Record Collector News* hit the streets. At a whopping 20 pages, our circulation totaled 6,500 papers distributed at about 60 record stores, mostly in Southern California. We had about 27 advertisers.

Ten years later our circulation has grown to as much as 15,000 papers distributed at over 400 locations around the country. Vinyl sales are up ten years in a row. There are many more record stores today than when we first started.

Record Collector News has grown, but let's just say, my personal finances do not match the awesomeness of the record collection I am putting together. And I am listening to those records on a much-improved sound system that's the best I've ever had. The fact that my turn-

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table is worth more than my car says as much about my turntable as it does about my car. In other words, *RCN* has allowed me to get my priorities right. I have never regretted the price I paid for an awesome record... or turntable!

With those priorities as a guiding light, *RCN*'s mission is to get my fellow collectors into record stores to buy records and then to play those records on equipment that thrills them. That's what it's all about. For me. Oh, there might be the occasional sealed record that I held onto and never tore open. Whatever.

George Carlin had a joke about weed. There is two-hit weed. There is one-hit weed. And, there is no-hit weed. You just keep the no-hit weed in the closet and stay high. I guess that's what sealed records are about. Me, I prefer the two-hit shit. It's really, really good, but not the end of the world if you spill a little.

So, dig in folks. Get into those record bins. Needless to say, I hit a lot of record stores and observe treasures every single day. I bought a white label promo copy of the Kinks' *Lola versus Powerman and the Moneygoround* the other day. White label promo! Teasing me on the wall! I came back the next day with an armful of unwanted records to trade and grabbed it. Stone-cold "mint," it sounds stunning. It's so much more fun than going online to Amabayzon. Plus, you can get into the whole record stores subculture which includes every single cliché you can imagine on display somewhere near you.

This white label promo copy of the Kinks', *Lola versus Powerman and the Moneygoround*, recorded in 1970, is the latest addition to the Kaplan collection.

Yet, the best thing about the vinyl haunts is when the equally crazed staff there gets to know what you like and turns you onto something that might seem like a stretch at first, and then becomes something wonderful. That happens all the time.

There would be no *Record Collector News* without Harvey Kubernik and Suzanne Rush. Suzanne and I have worked together on every one of these magazines and she is responsible for the art, design and look and Harvey has penned about 65 of the 68 cover stories. Thanks to you both.

To everyone who reads, and advertises, with *RCN*, thank you. You are the life and blood of *Record Collector News*.

I hope you love it as much as I do. It's a way of life.

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THE FINAL TOUR

DAVIS & COLTRANE

Five legendary 1960 concerts given by Miles Davis and John Coltrane in Paris, Stockholm and Copenhagen are available for the first time in the latest volume in the award-winning Miles Davis Bootleg series

BY HARVEY KUBERNIK

IN MARCH, COLUMBIA/LEGACY RECORDINGS, a division of Sony Music Entertainment, released *Miles Davis & John Coltrane - The Final Tour: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6* . Available in 4-CD boxset and digital configurations, *Miles Davis & John Coltrane - The Final Tour: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6* brings together, for the first time in an authorized edition with state-of-the-art production, five mythic concert performances as heard by lucky audiences during the epochal Spring 1960 Jazz at The Philharmonic European Tour presented by impresario Norman Granz.

Showcasing the musical chemistry shared by *Miles and Trane, Miles Davis & John Coltrane - The Final Tour: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6* offers five of the best recorded shows from that pivotal 1960 tour (Coltrane's last as sideman): two shows from Paris's L'Olympia Theater on Monday, March 21; two shows from the next night at Stockholm's Konserthuset; and one from Copenhagen's Tivolis Koncertsal three days later, on March 24.

Miles Davis

DON HUNSTEIN/SONY MUSIC ARCHIVES

The box set was produced by the multi-Grammy winning team of producers Steve Berkowitz, Michael Cuscuna and Richard Seidel. And mastered by multi-Grammy winning Sony Music engineer Mark Wilder. The set is authorized for official release by the Miles Davis Estate, the John Coltrane Estate, and Columbia Records/Legacy Recordings. Erin Davis, Cheryl Davis and Vince Wilburn, Jr. are Executive Producers.

Miles Davis and John Coltrane were each implementing their own jazz revolutions at the time these recordings were made and the electrifying sonic frisson produced by the sometimes-competing/sometimes-intertwining musical visions of the artists perplexed contemporary jazz fans — many of whom were just getting acquainted with the recently-released and now iconic *Kind of Blue*.

The repertoire performed in this collection is a veritable Miles Davis "Greatest Hits" including " 'Round Midnight," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "On Green Dolphin

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

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Street," "Walkin'," "All Of You" and "Oleo," all of which he had made his own and had been performing for some time. As well as more recent additions to the repertoire which were composed by Davis — "So What" and "All Blues" — both from *Kind Of Blue*.

Miles Davis & John Coltrane-The Final Tour: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6 is essential listening, an invitation to travel through time to experience the beauty and magic of Miles and Trane at the peak of their collective powers. The memorable ensemble includes Miles Davis (trumpet), John Coltrane (tenor sax), Wynton Kelly (piano), Paul Chambers (bass), Jimmy Cobb (drums), all of whom had been performing together since the *Kind Of Blue* album.

Originally broadcast on European radio in March 1960, these concert recordings have been long sought after and prized by collectors and are now officially available at last as the latest installment in Columbia/Legacy's acclaimed Miles Davis Bootleg Series.

For 12" vinyl collectors and audiophiles, Columbia/Legacy released *The Final Tour: Copenhagen, March 24, 1960* as a single 12" vinyl album.

A 2-LP 12" vinyl edition of *Miles Davis & John Coltrane - The Final Tour: Paris, March 21, 1960* will be reissued exclusively through Vinyl Me, Please as part of their new VMP Classics subscription featuring the best jazz, blues & soul reissues on 180g black vinyl with exclusive listening notes. Available by signing up at vinylmeplease.com

Vince Wilburn, Jr., nephew of late jazz icon Miles Davis, oversees Miles Davis Properties, LLC, along with Erin Davis (son of Miles) and Cheryl Davis (daughter of Miles). Wilburn, Jr. is a highly accomplished drummer and producer, who has both toured and recorded with Miles on many recordings from 1984 through 1987.

More recently, Wilburn, Jr. is performing with the Miles Electric Band to sold-out crowds globally. On Saturday, June 9th, Miles Electric Band is booked for the Hollywood Bowl at the annual Playboy Jazz Festival.

Wilburn, Jr. is also a co-host of Miles Davis House at SXSW with Erin Davis, an annual day party featuring a wide cross section of multi-genre, emerging talent.

I interviewed Vince this past March about the Davis and Coltrane *The Final Tour* and the legacy of Miles Davis.

VINCE WILBURN, JR.

HK: When and how did the planning of this Davis/Coltrane box happen?

VW: We met with the Legacy team and we came up with a plan of what would Miles lovers like next. Something that is special. We don't want to, for lack of a better word, keep re-hashing reissues. We come up with ideas and bounce them off each other.

"We get tapes from all over. People send us bootlegs, videos, audio. It's collectors, you know. [Carlos] Santana is an avid collector. He's serious.

"With the Bootleg Series we're

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News, August 2015

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even like detailed down to the packaging. That's why the box sets get so much notoriety and awards. Because Miles was that kind of guy. So, the packaging is gonna match the music.

Q: Do you have any reflection about the Davis and Coltrane relationship that is officially documented now for the retail world?

A: I think Miles really loved John. I never talked to him about it. But I can bet money he really loved John Coltrane.

Q: Is it a different Miles we hear when he is sharing a bandstand with John?

A: Yes. I mean, it's different, and John sounds like he's reaching extra for something to me. He sounds like 'I gotta get it out. I got to get it out what I'm feeling inside of me.'

Q: The musicians (Kelly, Chambers, Cobb) join with Coltrane and Davis as a unit on these recorded live dates. Drummer Jimmy Cobb wails.

A: Jimmy Cobb to me is a super hero. The touch and the way he approaches the drums. Still to this day. It's magical. Jimmy Cobb was like a painter. Wynton Kelly. Amazing. Paul Chambers, come on now. It was like an all-star team.

Q: What was it like for you to hear the playbacks of this material?

A: I think my mother is there. Uncle Miles is definitely there. I have dreams about him. And what I try and do personally anything Miles I'm excited about. And I've been like that since I was a kid. When he used to come to Chicago. My mom would dress me up and get my hair cut, 'cause uncle Miles was coming. And this was back when you could meet the passengers at the gate of O'Hare International Airport. And I was excited running to the gate and then walking back through the terminal, if you can picture this, with everybody stopping Miles, the sky caps, and he's clean, and I'm a little kid tagging next to him. And so it's that kind of love. 'Blue and Green' was my grandmother's favorite song.

"And then, as I got older, and really knew the magnitude of this man, and it was like wow. And that's how I feel when I listen to the music when I'm in the [tape] vault. And when I was on stage with him in the eighties there was the wow factor. When we were off stage he would change clothes five or six times a day. I don't know anybody to this day who does that. I saw him in some jeans and denim overalls one time. And I saw the iconic photo of him wearing denim at Newport. Man, the music, the man, and the persona it was like a storm.

"When I lived with uncle Miles in Malibu with Erin, you are talking about somebody who ate, slept and dreamt music. Miles was a hell of a cook but he would

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

"And when I was on stage with him in the eighties there was the wow factor. When we were off stage he would change clothes five or six times a day."

–VINCE WILBURN JR.

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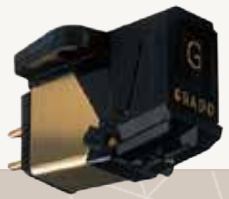

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eat small portions. And he was always in the boxing gym. That was key. Always was in tune with his body, with his clothes, and the way his clothes fit and felt.

Q: What were some of the things you learned from Miles playing with him?

A: Never rest on your laurels. Keep the music moving and advancing. It was all about the music, what is going on onstage or in the studio. And that's the way I approach the Miles Electric Band.

Q: You dig vinyl.

A: I'm a vinyl head. There is no question you get better hi-end on vinyl than CD's. Without a doubt. We're doing a deal with MacIntosh now for a signature Miles Davis turntable.

Q: You get approached for all sorts of endorsement and brand partnerships. Have there been requests to sample the Miles Davis catalog by rock, hip hop and rap artists?

A: We were approached by a hip hop group who wanted to use something from Sketches of Spain. And they opened up with 'bitches and whores,' so we shot it down. But the estate is very open to positive messages with music and we'll listen to anyone who wants to come at us to sample any of any Uncle Miles' music. We don't want anything derogatory or any talking down of women or race. All positive messages.

Q: Do you have any theory why the music of Miles Davis endears and endures many decades after initially being created?

A: I think that when you have a person who has changed the course of music four or five times it's like, me personally, even if I wasn't related to Uncle Miles, I'd want to hang on to his every word, you know. I'd follow him like the Pied Piper. And he was the man back then. And still. Anybody I talk to, Charlie Watts, Keith Richards, John Mayer, everybody loves Miles.

I ASKED SEVERAL MUSICIANS, deejays and filmmakers to comment about *Miles Davis & John Coltrane-The Final Tour: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6*

DR. JAMES CUSHING
KEBF-FM deejay who hosts Miles Ahead.

"I'M DIGGING COLTRANE'S SOLO on the Paris take of 'All of You' right now, and the whole Paris show is simply amazing — I've never heard tenor saxophone played like this, never at this level of speed or musicality or soulfulness.

"Coltrane has taken his playing to the point that it seems as though he is taking his concept of modal improvisation using scalar patterns as far as it can possibly go before it explodes into something entirely other. This is the sound of the future in the guise of the new present, with Miles on top of his repertoire and his wardrobe, playing sparse suggestions to set up Trane's exhaustive catalogues of possibility. It's the long-awaited meeting of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, only it really swings."

KENNETH KUBERNIK
Author and musician

"LIKE RUTH AND GEHRIG, TWO titans from an earlier 'Jazz Age,' who rose above their gifts into the rarefied mists of the American Avalon, Miles Davis and John Coltrane bestrode the 1950s like intemperate Gods who brandished their instruments with a kind of lethal swagger.

"Miles, pitch black and brooding, blew volleys of short, serrated edges, often burnished in a soothing liquid amber, as

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"Miles Davis and John Coltrane bestrode the 1950s like intemperate Gods who brandished their instruments with a kind of lethal swagger."

–DR. JAMES CUSHING

artful and unforgiving as a Floyd Patterson combination. Coltrane, strong and stoic as Paul Bunyan, privileged rhapsodies of notes whose cumulative weight could drown the uninitiated listener in pools of sorrow. There were no easy outs when they hit the bandstand, as fearsome a front line as ever counted out a downbeat. Befitting their mercurial personalities, their partnership was fraught; periods of great productivity (the small group recordings for Prestige and Columbia) followed by dramatic ruptures, precipitated by 'Trane's harrowing drug use.

"In 1960, Coltrane recommitted himself to his family and craft, a searing exercise in self-renewal that would lead to his great creative outpouring in the years to follow.

"But first, he agreed to join Miles on one last European tour. These performances have been exhaustively documented and debated over the years; Miles content to skip lightly over a set of familiar standards while Coltrane laid waste to any conventional musical expectations being served up by the spit-polished rhythm section of Kelly, Chambers and Cobb. No one was happy but that didn't diminish the value of the music; on the contrary, catching supremely-skilled artists in agitated flight has kept this music in a perpetual state of irresolution which has merited continual critical and commercial reassessment.

"And so, it's Sony Legacy's turn to repackage three of these fabled concerts and reintroduce them to the next generation of listeners whose ears are rife for a fresh revelation. Like picking the greatest ballplayers of all time, jazz fans, like their baseball brothers, have long recognized this undertaking as a blood sport, which, given the stakes, is as it should be."

MICHAEL SIMMONS
Musician and writer

"THE 1960 EUROPEAN TOUR recordings are remarkable for the variety of styles heard: Miles' muted, cool, I-vant-to-be-alone buzz; pianist Wynton Kelly's classy, artful solos; Coltrane's early forays into the avant-garde with his trademark bursts of notes – what writer Ira Gitler famously dubbed 'sheets of sound.'

"Liners scribe Ashley Kahn points out that Trane was also experimenting with multiphonics, or 'playing more than one note at a time.' Some found the contrast of these stylistic variations jarring – I think it shows there's plenty of room in jazz to be yourself."

SARAH KRAMER
Trumpet player / horn arranger

"MELODIES SOARING OVER driving changes, swinging grooves, and so versatile to also play so cool and laid back,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

bluesy, what a band!! Nothing beats a live performance, as far as energy/vibe, which includes an exchange from the audience(s). The height of the *Kind Of Blue* period, such a profound time/sound, and captured so well in these recordings, such depth, so special. Such great songs and improvisation. 'Round Midnight' is one of my most favorite melodies and it's such a treat to hear it live with these musicians... And then the originals, like 'All Blues,' Miles' classics... so cool to hear the improvisations that have themes/licks that ended up on the *Kind Of Blue* album, but being played fresh and in the moment in these live performances in a different way.

"As a trumpet player, Miles has been a major influence for me. Whether (Harmon) muted or open horn, he had his signature sound/style that transcends. So lyrical, such great phrasing and rhythmic sensibilities. I've always dug his use of space and his tone. So dynamic, and I love all the bent notes! Miles was tremendously tasteful.

"As was John Coltrane...His colorful flurries painting pictures of feeling(s). Trane made music on a spiritual level. I loved hearing his interview included in this box

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Miles Davis and John Coltrane

FRANZ HUBMANN_IMAGNO_GETTY IMAGES

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set, to hear his speaking voice, and to hear him talk about his journey within the freedom of improvisation that Miles and this band offered each other collectively. That modal approach to playing over changes and using horns as a voice, as if singing, but expressing far more without words... The best musicians are great listeners, and these players are so tuned into each other and themselves. These are timeless innovators in their prime, and we're so lucky to have these moments captured and accessible."

JOHN SCHEINFELD
Director, Chasing Trane: The John Coltrane Documentary

"NOT BEING AN OBSESSED JOHN Coltrane fan, I learned many things about the man and the musician while making *Chasing Trane: The John Coltrane Documentary.*

"Perhaps the most significant was understanding the arc and nuances of his spiritual journey, into which we take a deep dive in the film. It is the spiritual aspect of his life that makes Coltrane so unique and most certainly different from so many other mainstream artists. Over the years I've interviewed many rock-and-rollers who aren't the least bit embarrassed to admit that the reason they got into music was to score with girls and drug dealers. But for the better part of his life spirituality was essential to Coltrane's music and message. It was when he lost his spiritual center and became a heroin addict that his creativity, sense of responsibility and progress as a musician were inhibited. And it was when he kicked his addiction and returned to a spiritual path that he became the iconic musician we know today."

Miles Davis

DON HUNSTEIN SONY MUSIC ARCHIVES DON HUNSTEIN SONY MUSIC ARCHIVES

It is the spiritual aspect of his life that makes Coltrane so unique and different from other artists."

–JOHN SCHEINFELD

Harvey Kubernik is the author of 14 books. *Inside Cave Hollywood: The Harvey Kubernik Music InnerViews and InterViews Collection, Vol. 1* was published in Dec. 2017, by Cave Hollywood. In March 2018, Other World Cottage Industries published Kubernik's *The Doors Summer's Gone*. Kubernik is scheduled to publish another music title in 2018. Earlier this century, he was a featured speaker discussing audiotape preservation and archiving at special hearings called by The Library of Congress, held in Hollywood, California.

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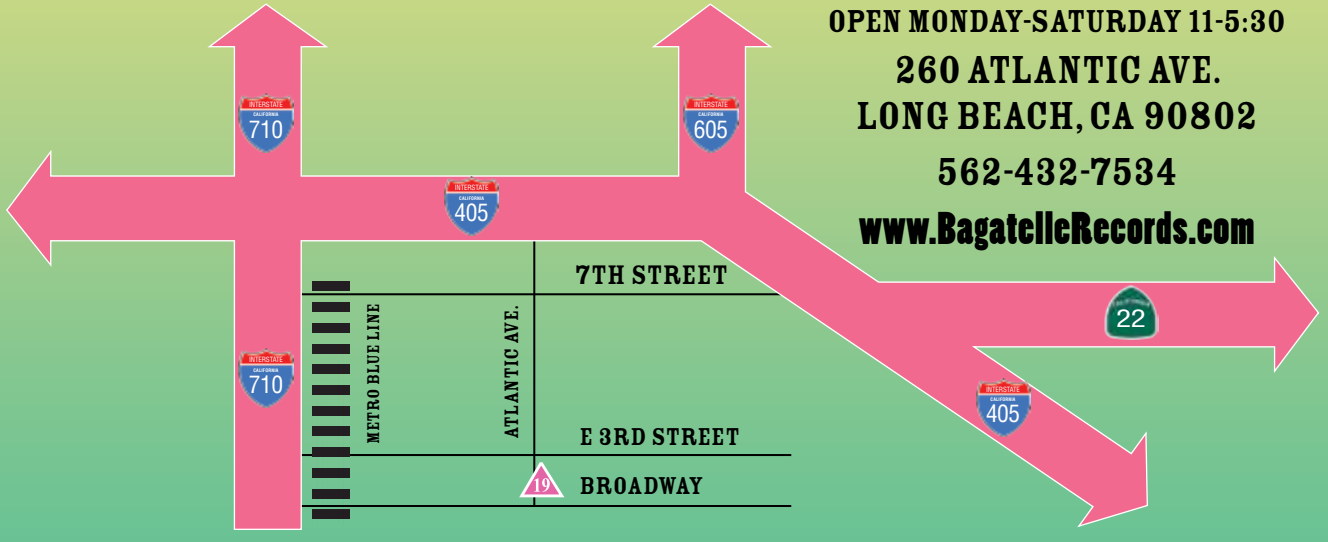

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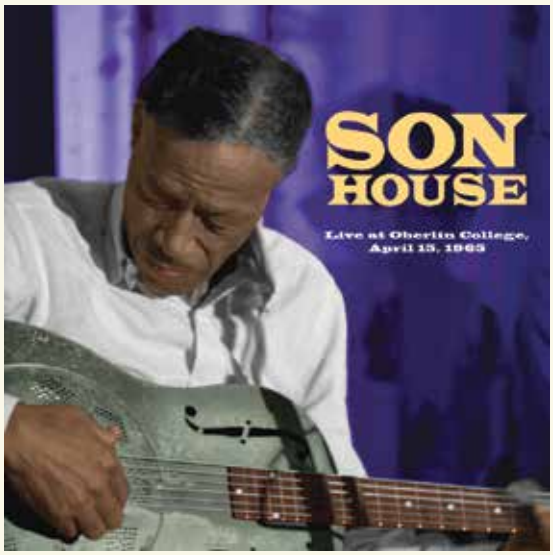

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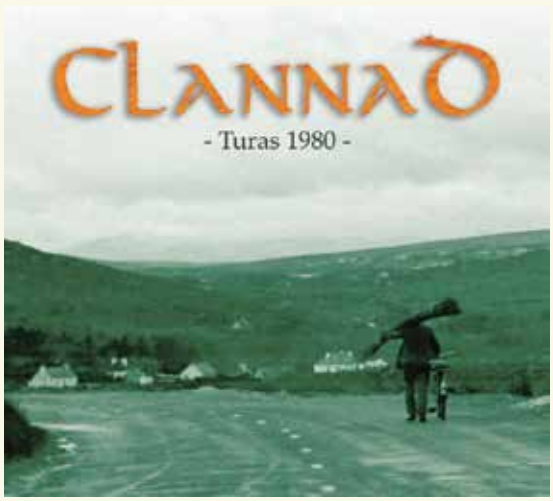

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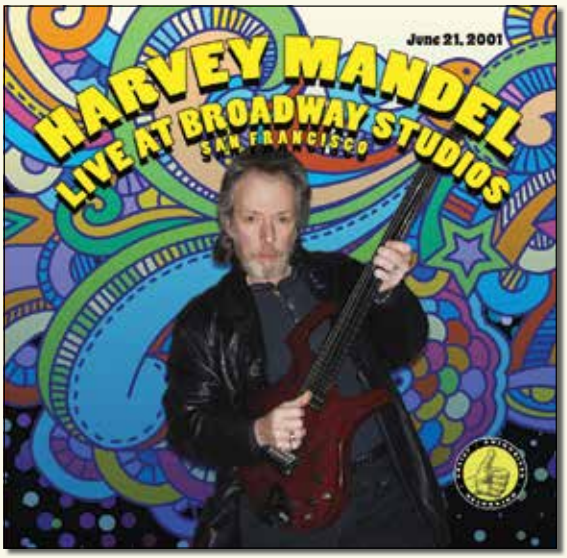

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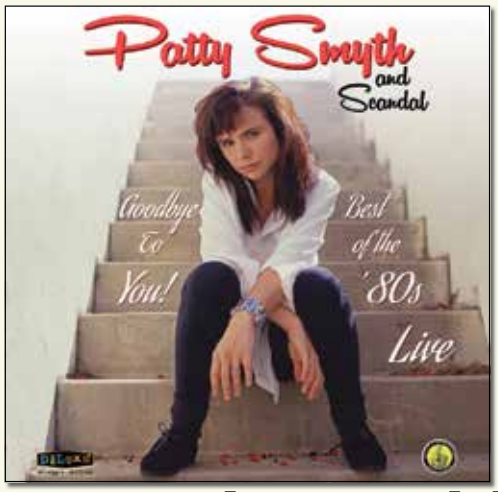

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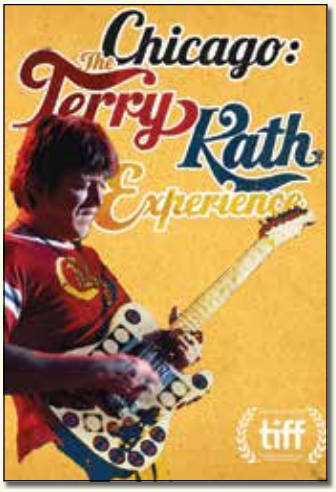

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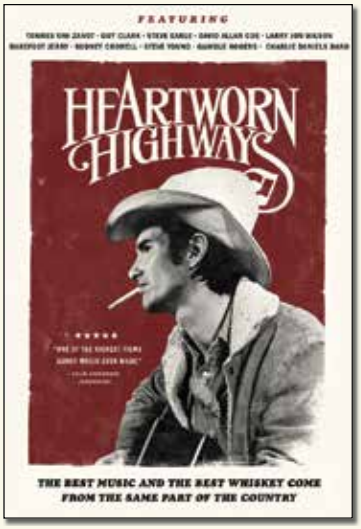

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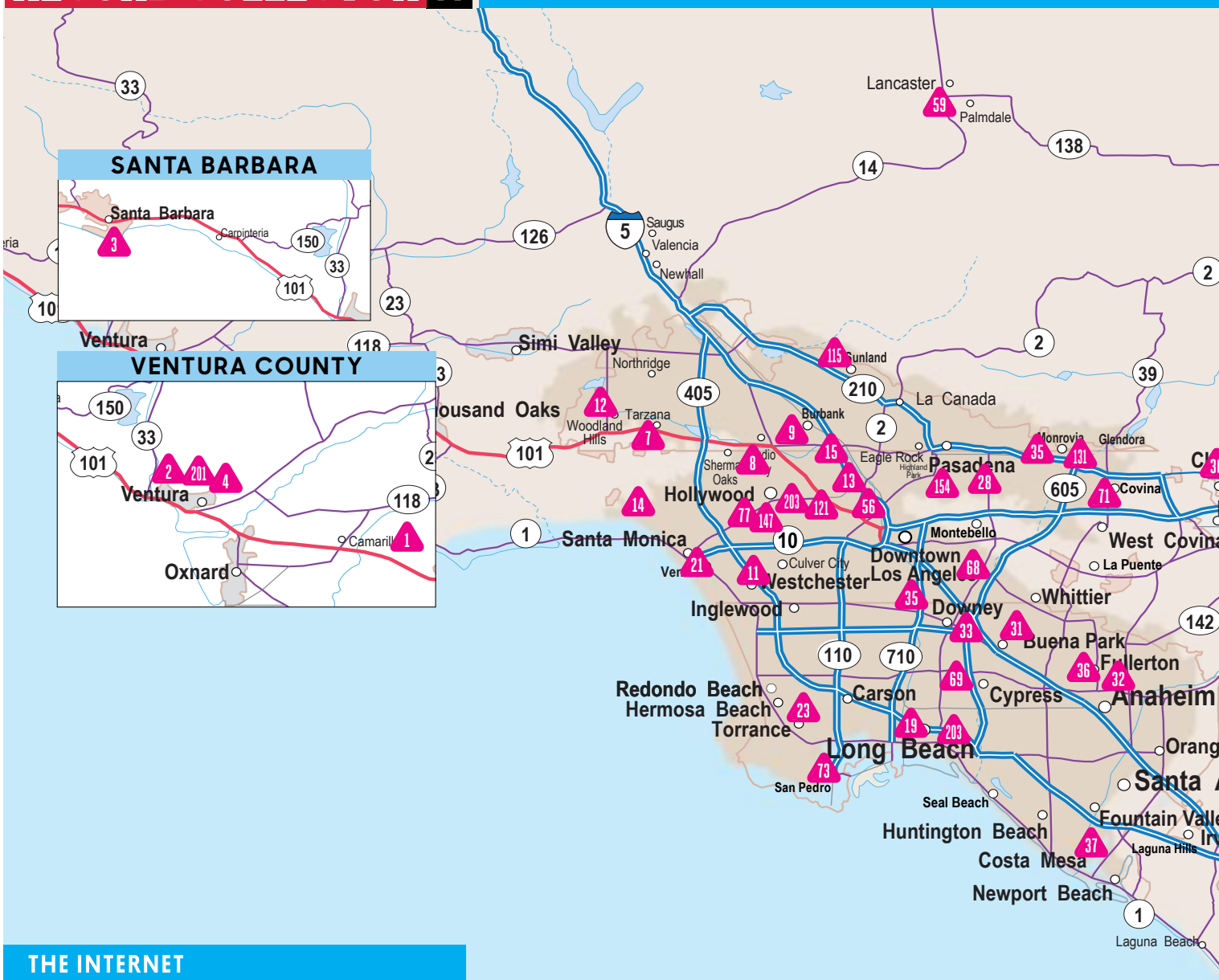

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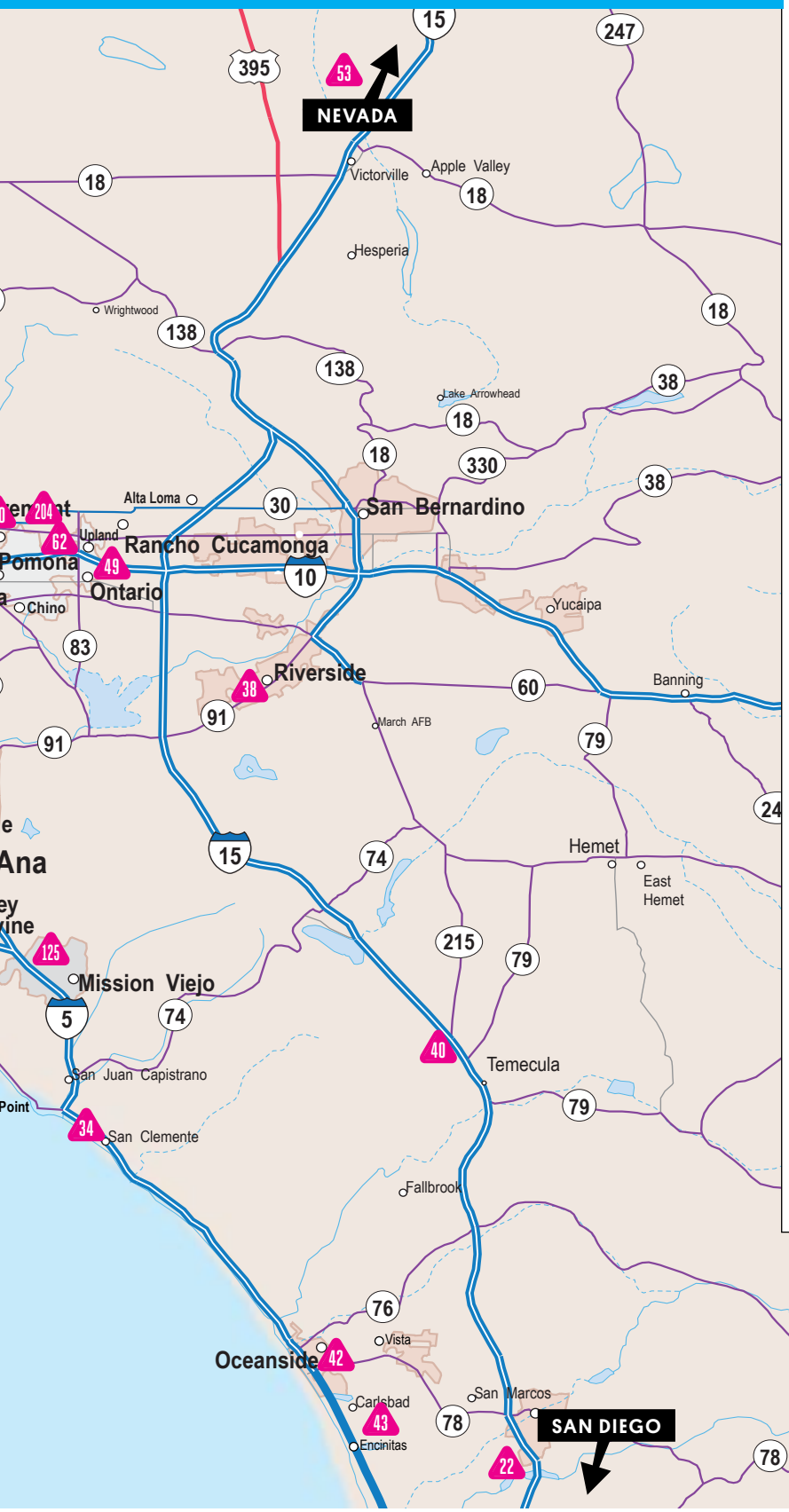

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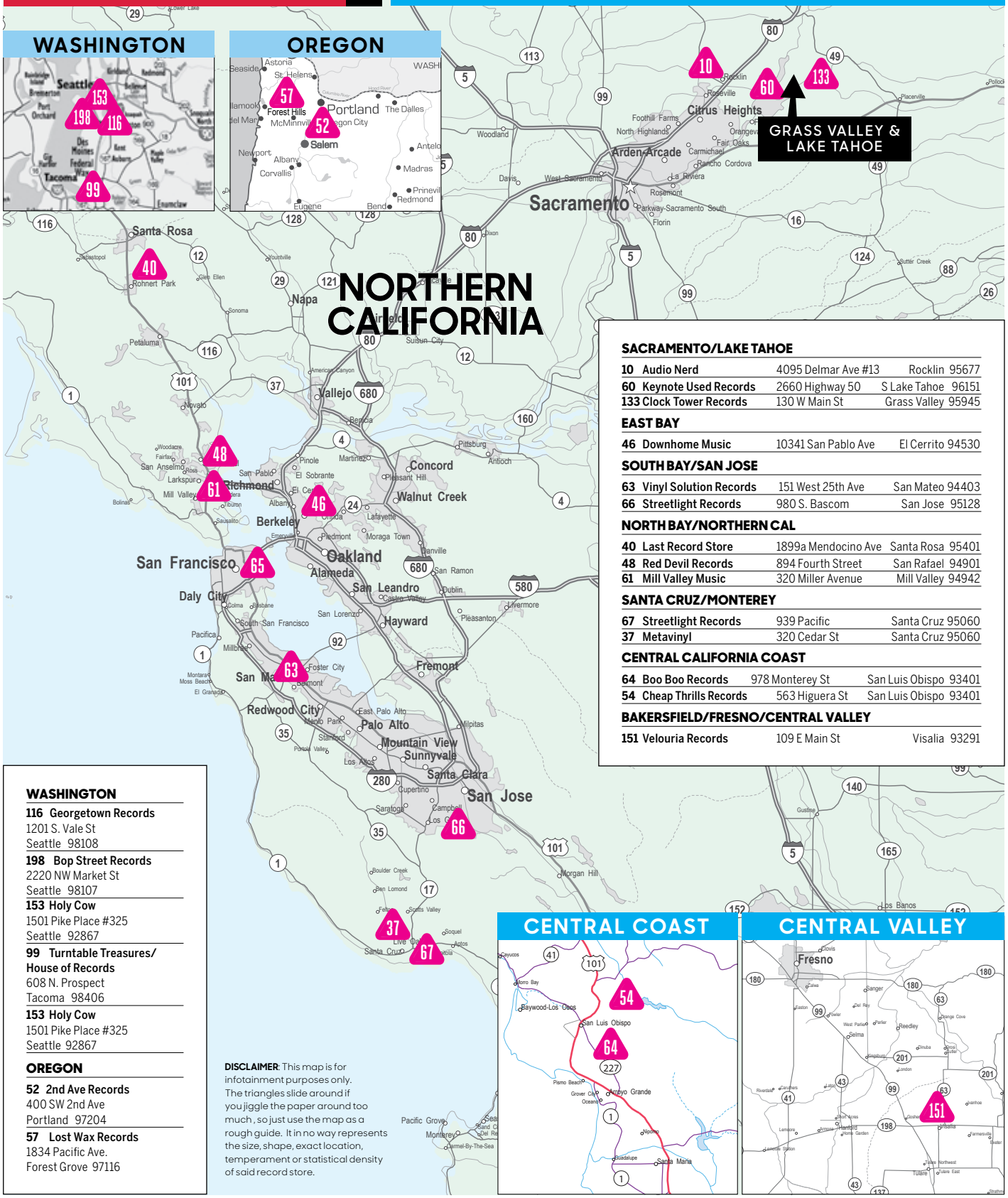
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Live from California, it's the Electric Flag

MVD's new release pulls from live shows at L.A.'s Whisky A Go Go and San Francisco's Carousel Ballroom to showcase rock's first "super-group"

BY HARVEY KUBERNIK

THE ELECTRIC FLAG WAS ONE OF THE premiere rock bands during 1967-1968, organized by guitarist Mike Bloomfield, who had just left the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

The Electric Flag featured drummer Buddy Miles, vocalist Nick Gravenites, bassist Harvey Brooks, and keyboardist Barry Goldberg. The group incorporated a full horn section in support of its searing blues and jazz based rock originals.

Sadly, egos and internal chaos prevailed and the group broke up after only two years of performing and recording.

During April 2018, RockBeat Records via MVD Entertainment Group continues the live show legacy of the Electric Flag with the long-awaited retail release, *Electric Flag: Live In California 1967-1968*. The CD is culled from shows at The Whisky A-Go-Go in September, 1967 and the Carousel Ballroom, San Francisco May 18, 1968.

I saw the band in 1967 and as a re-formed outfit in 1974. I later interviewed Bloomfield in 1978 for *Melody Maker*. The Electric Flag made deep impact on several people I know who still relish their 1968 debut Columbia Records disc, *Long Time Comin'*.

"I saw the Paul Butterfield Blues Band with Mike Bloomfield at the Golden Bear in Huntington Beach in 1966 with my friends Jack Nitzsche and Chris Varez, aka the Big Kahuna from radio station KHJ," remembered record producer and music manager, Denny Bruce, a friend of Bloomfield.

"Michael was exhausted from touring in a van 1965-1966 and wanted to have a musical group that could play all sorts of American music. And Michael was very aware in 1967 about the white rock audience that were moving from the AM to the FM radio dial. And soul music on the AM dial, in Los Angeles on KGFJ and all over the U.S. was very popular. It was the golden era of R&B. Particularly the great singles," Bruce underscored.

"Bloomfield explained, 'I don't hear guitar solos in this shit. I want a band that will be self-contained. Good guys, horns, and I can be based in Mill Valley, have a band of veteran guys that really don't give a fuck about touring. Musicians that know the shit so I can say an obscure R&B tune and I'm covered and don't have to think about flying to Memphis for the Memphis Horns to overdub instruments.'

"I caught The Electric Flag's 1967 Whisky a Go Go gig," enthused Denny. "They were excellent. I had seen Otis Redding there, who had changed the musical complexion of Hollywood. We had the folk-rock stuff, for me to get an injection from Otis Redding, good players, and that's what Michael was trying to bring to people. And not a fuckin' guitar band. This is new R&B with a larger forum because his IQ and his knowledge of music was encyclopedic.

"On stage they were very good and they weren't loud and Michael was still playing through one amplifier. And he didn't have to solo or carry the burden like Eric [Clapton] with Cream and the virtuoso guys. Mike's vision for the Electric Flag was Stax-inspired and his horns had to blow."

"At the June 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival, I thought the Mike Bloomfield Thing, the working name of Electric Flag, was very exciting," reminisced writer and drummer Paul Body. "To me, the 'Flag are sort of the Terry Malloy of that era of 60's. They had all of the ingredients to be monsters," Body lamented. "They could rock, they could be bluesy and they certainly had SOUL.

"At the Monterey International Pop Festival on Saturday afternoon I will never forget seeing them do 'The Night Time Is The Right Time,' the old Ray Charles number. Buddy Miles was killing it, sitting behind the drums looking like a giant tree trunk. The only group that looked cooler at Monterey Pop was the Jimi Hendrix Experience. They did that song 'Wine' and killed that one too. Stinging Bloomfield guitar, honking horns, keyboard and Nick the Greek on vocals. This was cool stuff.

"This might have been the very first 'super group,'" suggested Paul. "I was rocked to my socks. Later saw them on February 10th 1968 in Los Angeles opening for the Jimi Hendrix Experience and they were already a well-oiled machine.

"The first album came out and it was an instant classic for me, especially Barry Goldberg's 'Sittin' In Circles' which was a SOUL monster. By the summer of '68, Bloomfield was gone. By the end of the year they were almost

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

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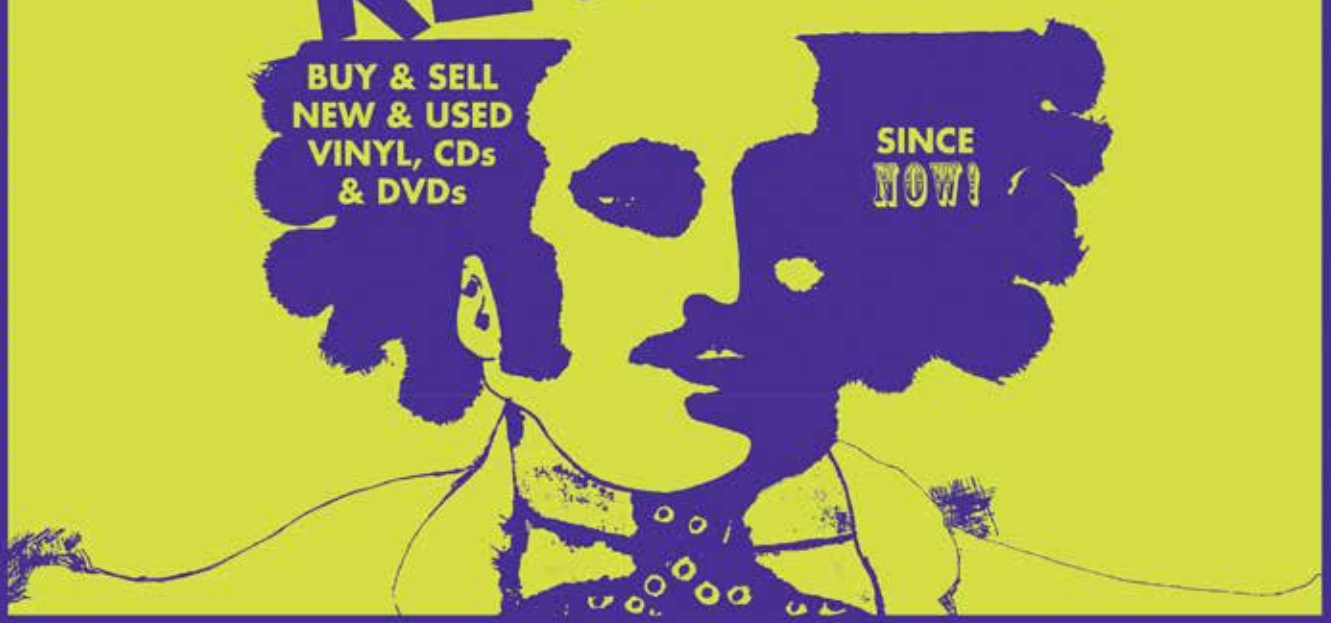

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a memory. The Electric Flag were fleeting, like shadow, almost but like Terry Malloy, they could have been a contender.

"Can't wait to hear the live album."

"From the ashes of The Paul Butterfield Blues Band arose the short-lived, quasi-super group, The Electric Flag in 1968," reflected Gene Aguilera, East L.A. music historian and boxing book author. "I was in East L.A. heaven caught between the stinging lead guitar of Michael Bloomfield, soulful presence of drummer Buddy Miles, and the tight keyboard playing of Barry Goldberg as I placed the needle down on their first LP *A Long Time Comin'* on Columbia Records.

"I daydreamed about where Thee Midniters would have been in 1968 (had they not broke-up) while listening to the tight horn section that punctuated the Latin-tinged jam section of *Another Country*. I remember the beautiful blonde model adorning the album cover, bathed in a rich purple-hue, jumping out at me as I shopped in the record section of Unimart on Whittier Blvd.

"This multi-racial, Chicago based blues-soul band — carrying the moniker of 'An American Music Band' — quickly became a favorite of mine. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the record's charming quirks: LBJ's voice opens the album, Janis Joplin gets name-checked on the track "Wine," and bizarre talk appears on *Another Country*. But I've harbored a deep, dark complaint since day one . . . who sang lead vocals on each track? The good old boys at Columbia should have listed this on the back cover, but never did, and it's been a nagging mystery to me ever since. It's time we found out."

Harvey Kubernik's 14th book, *The Doors Summer's Gone* was just published by Other World Cottage Industries. His previous book, *Inside Cave Hollywood: The Harvey Kubernik Music InnerViews and InterViews Collection, Vol. 1* was published in 2017, by Cave Hollywood.

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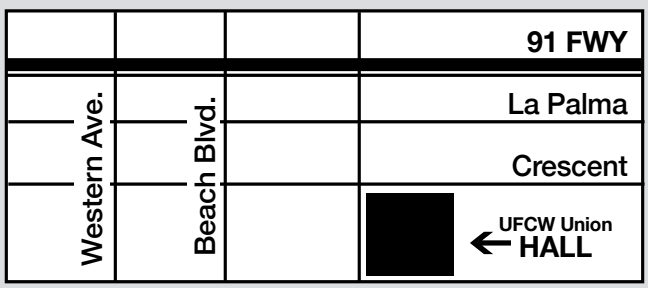

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Nina Simone: The Colpix Singles

The singer's stint at the label (1959 to 1963) was a strange and frustrating period

BY RICHIE UNTERBERGER

NINA SIMONE'S STINT at Colpix Records, taking in the years 1959 to 1963, was a strange and frustrating period for the singer. Yielding a wealth of uneven recordings, the results varied from brilliant to ill-conceived. Of course, you could say that of most of the periods of Simone's career. One of the hardest major artists of the twentieth century to classify into one or even two genres, she restlessly flitted between jazz, pop, soul, folk, gospel, and more. As bold as she was, her very adventurousness guaranteed both hits and misses.

At Colpix, though, the highs weren't quite as high as they'd be in the mid-to-late 1960s. As she'd just established herself as a jazz-pop vocalist of note on the Bethlehem label with her Top Twenty version of "I Loves You, Porgy," the larger Colpix company no doubt hoped she could replicate that success. But Simone wasn't really a singles-centric singer, her artistry too wide-ranging to be contained on seven-inch records.

That didn't stop Colpix from trying to get hits with Nina, however. They issued more than a dozen singles while she was with the company, and the A- and B-sides from all of them are on Stateside/Rhino's two-CD, 27-track compilation *The Colpix Singles*. Less striking, mature, and imaginative than her peak work for Philips in the mid-'60s, it still shows her developing into an artist of distinction, if in a poppier and less creative mold than she'd explore in her subsequent Philips and RCA recordings.

Nina Simone 1969, Netherlands

DUTCH NATIONAL ARCHIVES/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/RON KROON/ANEFO

Simone wrote or co-wrote just three of the songs, and her covers tended toward jazz-pop standards by the likes of Rodgers-Hammerstein, George & Ira Gershwin, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Irving Berlin, and Hoagy Carmichael. She sounds gutsier and more confident when she sinks her teeth into more contemporary, bluesier material, like Nat Adderley's "Work Song" (covering the adaptation incorporating lyrics by Oscar Brown, Jr.). She's also more forceful when putting highly individual stamps on traditional folk tunes, particularly "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair" and "Little Liza Jane."

Simone's strengths as an idiosyncratic vocalist shone best on haunted and somber material, though she could be likeably sassy and more upbeat, good-natured numbers. Her talents as a jazzy pianist with touches of her classical training are estimable too, though production-wise, Colpix took a rather all-over-the-map approach. That's especially the case on the flurry of singles — eight of them — it unleashed between fall 1959 and the end of 1960.

Some of these have hokey orchestration and backup choral vocals that, at their most dated, sound like a throwback to pre-rock days, or at least more at home on soundtrack LPs than pop-jazz ones. Some are live recordings that are more at home on albums than 45s, and not especially hitbound material, despite their virtues. But sometimes, wisdom prevails and the backup's a simple jazz combo, as on the spiritual "Children Go Where I Send You," "Trouble in Mind," and "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out." The sparser arrangements tend to be the most effective, especially on her stark, even spooky live adaptation of the folk standard "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair," which has only her voice and piano until the very end.

The singles declined in

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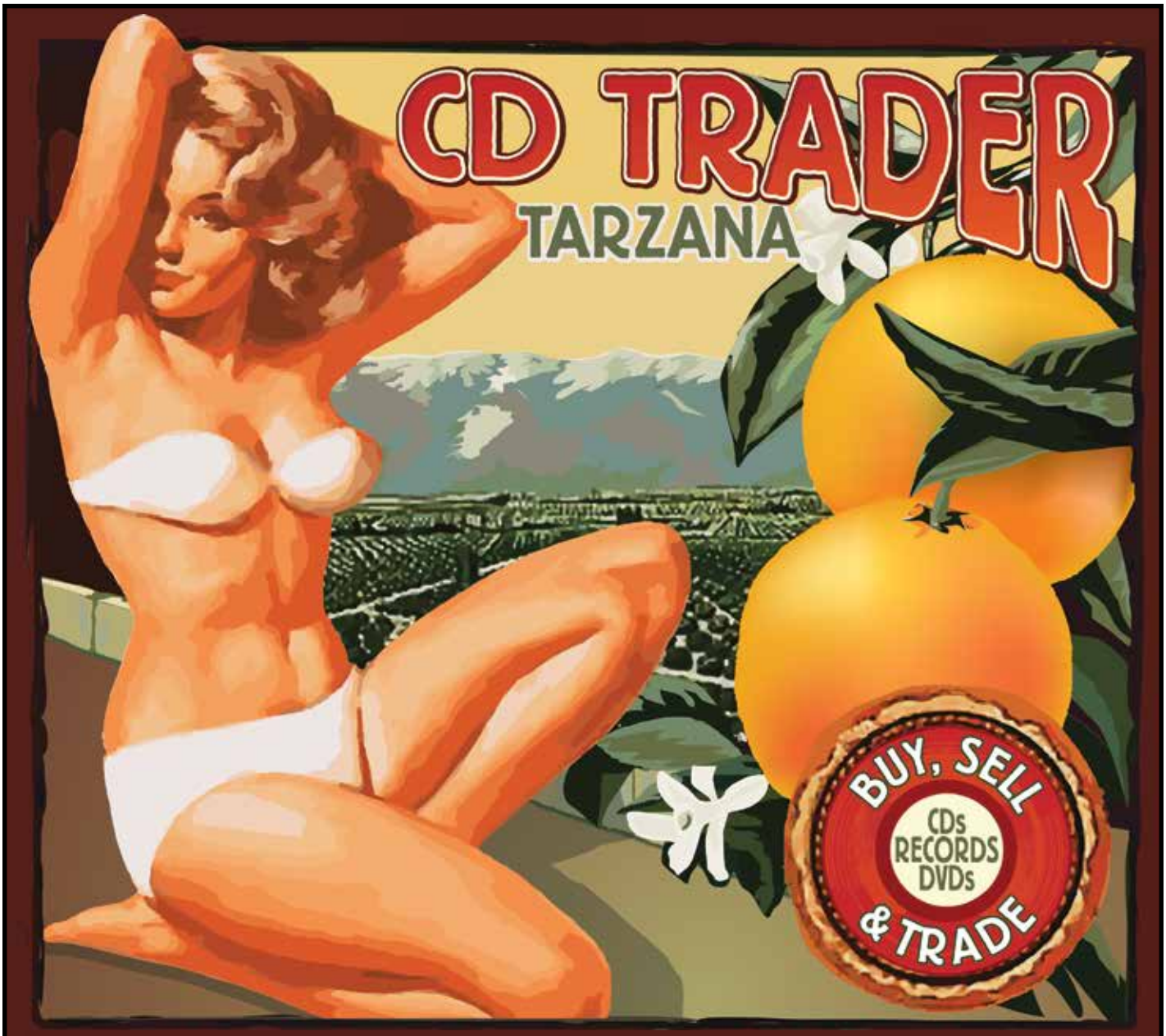

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frequency from 1961 to 1963, Colpix perhaps realizing that Simone should be an album-oriented act. Some of the later cuts display more command and confidence than her earlier work, like "Gin House Blues" and the aforementioned "Work Song." There's still too much jazz in these to be labeled early soul, but Nina did more or less take a stab at the soul market with "Come on Back Jack," an "answer" record to Ray Charles's "Hit the Road, Jack." It's kind of fun, but also kind of contrived.

By 1963 Colpix wasn't pushing Simone hard in the 45 market, and just two songs here, a live version of "Little Liza Jane" and its B-side "Blackbird," date from that year. More than any other track on this compilation, "Blackbird" (its composition credited to her and Herbert Sacker) anticipates her more accomplished and personal work of the mid-to-late 1960s.

Backed only by hard-to-identify percussion—it sounds like a combination of hands slapping, bongos, and an eerie pulsating vibration from another instrument—it takes the spiritual/gospel feel of much of Simone's early work into almost avant-garde territory, with more than a hint of African folk. It's not hit single stuff by any means, but that hardly mattered then, and it doesn't matter at all now.

Despite Colpix's repeated attempts, none of these songs were hits, though "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out" made #93, and "Trouble in Mind" #92. Fortunately, her Colpix output wasn't limited to 45s, though it overexposed her, issuing eight LPs (plus a compilation) of live and studio recordings in four years. Taken on its own, *The Colpix Singles* give a fair idea of her musical progression, as fitful and erratic as it was, in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

But if you already have a lot of Simone on Colpix, is this worth adding to your collection? That

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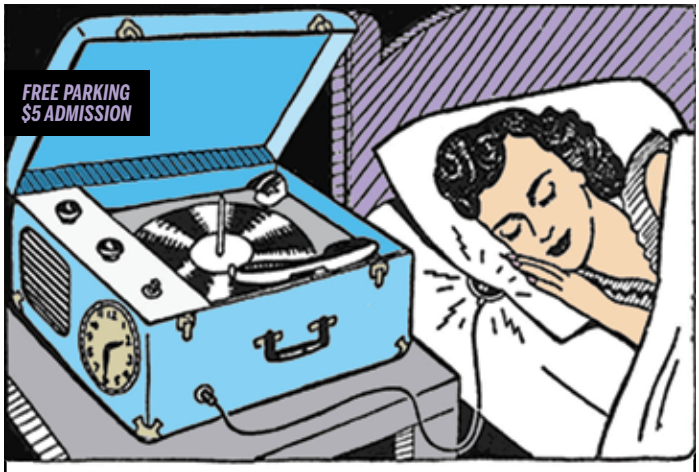
depends on exactly what you own. There have been a good number of CD reissues of her Colpix material, the best of them being Rhino's two-disc *Anthology: The Colpix Years*, from 1996. And indeed, almost half of *The Colpix Singles* isn't on Anthology, though these tend to be the less impressive standards. Anthology did cherry-pick the best cuts, so this is more of a fill-in for completists.

If you're a completist to the point of being a fetishist, note that *The Colpix Singles* does have seven single edits that appear for the first time since their original release. Perhaps of greater appeal to collectors, all have been remastered in mono. Also note, however, that with just over 78 minutes of running time, this could have fit onto a single CD, though the two-disc format does allow for gatefold packaging with repros of inner labels of a few Colpix 45s. The liners aren't extensive but do give a reasonable overview of the contents.

Most important of all, if you're new to Simone, don't confuse this with a best-of. She made some good music on these singles as she was finding her feet, both as a performer and a recording artist. But it was in the mid-1960s that she would truly blossom, in part because she developed a greater social consciousness, both in the songs she wrote and those she covered. Yet some of the seeds of her intriguing eclecticism—which she'd very much retain on Philips and RCA, remaining equally difficult to pigeonhole into one or two styles — were planted on these tracks.



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The Sound and the Fury

Unmasked: the Platinum Collection pulls together the best of Andrew Lloyd Weber; and new reissues for Sister Rosetta Tharpe fans

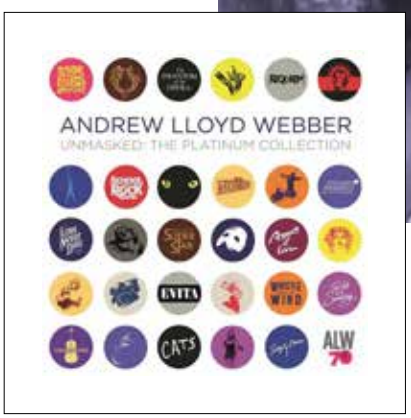
BY GILLIAN G. GAAR

Yvonne Elliman and Ted Neeley in the 1973 film *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

THERE IT WAS, WAITING FOR ME when I came home from camp in the summer of 1971: the original studio cast album of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the breakthrough rock musical by Tim Rice (lyrics) and Andrew Lloyd Webber (music). *Superstar* was a sensation when it was released in the fall of 1970; a commercial success (certified gold, the album spent three weeks at #1 in the U.S.), but controversial as well. Mary Magdalene's poignant love song to Jesus was seen as inappropriate; the story was said to be too sympathetic to Judas Iscariot; and surely the very notion of having a Biblical story set to heathen rock music was blasphemous to begin with.

But the dominant view was that *Superstar* was a terrific work, virtually a classic from the day of its release (and revisited just this past Easter with a live television broadcast starring John Legend in the title role). Andrew Lloyd Webber also turned 70 this year, and there are two new releases celebrating his reaching that landmark: *Unmasked: A Memoir* (HarperCollins), and *Unmasked: The Platinum Collection* (Polydor/UMC).



The Platinum Collection (available in 2 CD and 4 CD editions) functions as a greatest hits/best of set. It draws from 19 different musical works, one-off performances (Beyoncé's rendition of "Learning to Be Lonely" that she performed at the Oscars; "Amigos Para Siempre," performed by Sarah Brightman and José Carreras at the closing ceremony for the 1992 Olympics), and new numbers recorded especially for this collection (including Lana Del Ray's "You Must Love Me" from *Evita*).

Even those who aren't especially enamored of musicals might be surprised to discover how much of Lloyd Webber's work has permeated the culture. The first three notes of "Superstar" make it one of the world's most instantly recognizable songs. The same can be said of "Memory," "The Phantom of the Opera," "Don't Cry for Me Argentina," all of them featuring beguiling, memorable melodies (and all of them hit singles in the U.S., U.K., or both).

Tellingly, those songs are from the earlier years in Lloyd Webber's career. That's where Lloyd Webber ends his memoir, at *Phantom*'s opening preview, commenting that the show was the most commercially successful work of his career. He writes that he intended to tell his whole life story in one book, "but my verbosity got in the way" (the memoir does run to 487 pages). Of course, it's easy to write about success, but post-*Sunset Boulevard* (1993), the reception to Lloyd Webber's works has been mixed; of the seven musicals he's worked on since, only two have opened on Broadway. An afterword covers some of that work (he evidently wasn't that pleased with *Stephen Ward* [2013], nor was he a fan of the London production of his *Phantom* sequel, *Love Never Dies* [2010], saying it wasn't until

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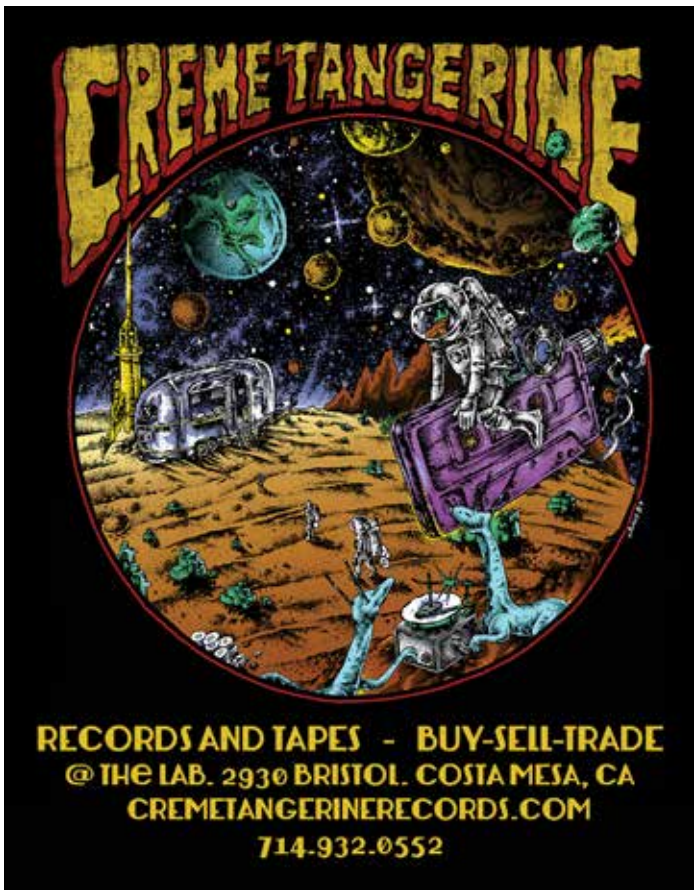

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the Australian production that "everything came together"), but only briefly; here's hoping for a Volume 2.

On *Platinum*, the songs are drawn from a variety of recordings; original studio casts, London casts, Broadway casts, film soundtracks, even a song performed by the cast of *Glee*, which makes for a more varied listening experience (a quibble; there's not enough specific release information about each song in the liner notes). It also allows for side-by-side comparisons with the different lyricists Lloyd Webber has worked with (another quibble; you need a magnifying glass to read the lyricists' names). Lloyd Webber's trademark is his unerring sense of melody, and it's interesting to hear how that's tempered by whoever he works with. Tim Rice's lyrics were always the most bitter (Lloyd Webber once said of his partner, "Tim can never write 'I love you.' It's always 'I love you, but...'"), and Don Black gives sharpness to the portrait of a single English woman looking for romance in the U.S. in *Tell Me on a Sunday*. But neither would've worked for *Phantom*, Lloyd Webber's most lush and romantic work.

There are some surprises. The version of "Music of Night" featured in the set is an earlier rendition, with different lyrics. And who remembers that one of the last songs Elvis recorded, at the October 29-30, 1976 session at Graceland's Jungle Room was a Lloyd Webber/Rice song? (the gloomy "It's Easy for You"). And there's an unexpected choice for "Don't Cry for Me Argentina"; the original studio cast version, sung Julie Covington, which was a hit in a number of countries, but not the U.S. (that wouldn't happen until Madonna recorded her version, for the *Evita* film). Covington's simple and heartfelt rendition is remarkable, especially in contrast to some of the more grandiose versions that came later on.

To present a more comprehensive look at his work, it would've been interesting had Lloyd Webber included his earliest material. He writes about his first single, "Down Thru' Summer," by Ross Hannaman (lyrics by Rice, released in 1967) in his memoir, but you won't find it on *Platinum* (you can check it out on YouTube). Nonetheless, both the box set and memoir offer an entertaining and insightful look at a remarkable talent.

IT'S ABOUT TIME FOR SISTER ROSETTA THARPE, 2018 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

SO, SISTER ROSETTA THARPE was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and what can you say but it's about time! Sister Rosetta was rocking and rolling before the genre was even sure what to call itself. She's been name-checked as an influence by the likes of Little Richard, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and countless others; it's great to see her

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getting more recognition at last.

Sister Rosetta played guitar virtually all her life and released her first recordings in 1938. Now, a veritable bonanza of her recordings have been reissued, courtesy of Verve/UMe, from those very first 1938 sessions all the way to 1962. There are expanded editions of *Blessed Assurance*, *Gospel Train* (both the 1956 and 1958 versions of the album), and *The Gospel Truth*, plus the albums sister *Rosetta Tharpe*, *Sister On Tour*, and *The Gospel Truth: All New! Her Greatest Gospel Hits*. But wait! The 130 singles she recorded for Decca have also been compiled in the five volume series *The Complete Decca Singles*.

That's over 200 songs, the vast majority of which have never been previously digitally available. Aficionados will want them all, of course, but where you start if you're just discovering this formidable talent?

Vol. 1 in the *Complete Decca Singles* series is an obvious place to begin, especially as it includes her first big hit, "Rock Me," ostensibly a spiritual number, but with enough swing in its stride that Sister Rosetta quickly crossed over to pop success as well (for comparison, this volume also has a 1941 version of the song recorded with Lucky Millinder and His Orchestra; better production values, but not the same swing).

And you can't go wrong with any of her live work, so *The Gospel Truth* gets the nod here, featuring terrific performances of "Things That I Used to Do (And I Don't Do No More)," and one of her signature songs, "Didn't It Rain" (there's two previously unreleased songs on this release as well). *Take the Gospel Train* next, then more live stuff on *Sister On Tour*.

Another nugget: Sister Rosetta trading licks with none other than Red Foley on "Have a Little Talk With Jesus," tucked away on Vol. 5 of the Decca Singles set. But be forewarned; once Sister Rosetta's high-spirited hooks get into you, you may find it too irresistible to stop.

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Hayden and Bley's Last Protest, *Time/Life*

Charlie Haden, September 2007

Carla Bley, Berlin 1979

HADEN: GEERT VANDEPOELE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; BLEY: JAZZIMAGE/

BY ARMAND LEWIS

JAZZ IS NOT NORMALLY considered to be protest music. By their nature, songs of protest or political struggle require lyrics. Being a predominantly instrumental form, jazz cannot express musically what can be expressed verbally. There have been some notable exceptions to this during the late 1950s and early 1960s including drummer Max Roach's "We Insist" and saxophonist Sonny Rollins' "Freedom Suite." Charles Mingus' composition "Fables of Faubus" protested school segregation by featuring shouted protests during what was otherwise a dissonant instrumental piece.

The most famous jazz protest, precisely because of the lyrical statement, was Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," a song that still speaks strongly today decades after the practice of lynching was abolished.

Protest songs generally address specific issues. The compositions listed above were cries for civil rights during that era and did not address political injustices beyond that specific cause. At the time, songs relating to political or labor struggles were more often sung in the folk idiom and not even rock & roll would take up political protest until the Vietnam era of the late 1960s.

Unfortunately, the need for such political protest continues. To this end, bassist Charlie Haden and composer/arranger Carla Bley have recorded the latest, and likely the last, incarnation of their Liberation Music Orchestra (LMO) to protest climate change and the damage mankind is doing to the environment.

Deeply committed to fighting political injustice and war since its beginnings, the first incarnation of the LMO came about in 1968 as a musical statement against the Vietnam war. Later albums took inspiration

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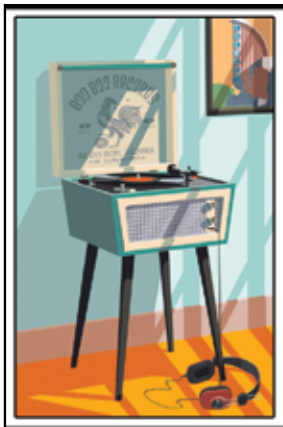
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from the Spanish Civil War and conflicts in El Salvador (1983's "Ballad of the Fallen"), the racial and political struggles in South Africa and El Salvador (1993's "Dream Keeper") and America's misguided war in Iraq (2005's "Not In Our Name").

The latest album, *Time/Life (Song for the Whales and Other Beings)* (Impulse 479 848-0), was initially conceived by Haden and Bley in 2007, when Haden became aware that the abuse of the environment had reached such a dangerous level that he felt he had to speak out about it. Sadly, his musical statement would not be not fully realized until after Haden's death in 2014 from post-polio syndrome.

Haden himself does appear on two of the main tracks of the CD: Bley's evocative arrangement of Miles Davis' "Blue in Green" and Haden's own "Song for the Whales." Both were initially recorded in concert in 2011 for Belgian Public Radio and appear in their full length — including spoken passages by Haden himself. For the remaining material, bassist Steve Swallow ably fills in.

Both Charlie Haden and Carla Bley are veterans of the avant-garde movement in jazz during the 1960s. Haden first made a name for himself with Ornette Coleman's original quartet and Carla Bley came to prominence a bit later with her big band The Jazz Composer's Orchestra. While not as exploratory as avant-garde music was in the 1960s, the Liberation Music Orchestra still retains elements of the experimental spirit of that movement.

The Miles Davis composition "Blue in Green," which originally appeared on the classic "Kind of Blue" album, gets a lush orchestral rendition reminiscent of Miles Davis' arranger Gil Evans, with trumpeter Michael Rodriguez in Davis' part. Likewise, Bley's composition "Útviklingssang" has a very

"Gil Evans" feeling to it, while retaining Bley's own style. "Song for the Whales" is equally evocative, while giving ample room for excellent solos all around.

While no instrumental music can ever adequately protest political/military actions or social injustice, it's important to use every method possible to fight injustice and corruption. The Liberation Music Orchestra's message remains one that must be heard.

Armand Lewis buys and sells rare Jazz LPs. He can be reached at mrbluenote@peoplepc.com

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